



Ninth step

THE PRAYER GROUPS - THEIR ORGANIZATION AND MISSION

BIBLICAL COMMENTS

"Jesus said: Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. (Mt 10, 16)

Every lover recognizes that it is difficult to keep one's love story hidden. Faith is a story; the story of an encounter between man and God, that takes place for each one of us. A story of love and salvation that cannot be kept hidden: every line of our face, every word, every gesture speaks of our faith. It is often the case that someone's story stems from another story that was once heard or listened to, which in turn generates the saving event for others. Together they appear as one single story, made up like a chain of many links. Every Christian carries in his heart the joy of seeing that his own history has been able to bring someone else to their encounter with God. The story of one's faith can be personal but most times it involves the whole community, too.

For us to bear witness in an efficient way so as to involve and enthuse others, we must follow what the Gospel teaches us, by being well organized and aware that we want to be part of a project of evangelization, thoughtful in taking care of the ways and timings of our neighbours. We are sent like sheep to make wolves meek; like snakes, we are sent not so much to talk, as to observe and be patient; like doves, full of tenderness and purity of soul, we are to convince not with threats, but charming them with our innocence.

SPIRITUALITY

The organizational structure of ecclesial groups and associations varies according to their aims and their own statutes. All the Groups are called to live in particular reverence of the Word of God, respect for the teachings of the magisterium and ecclesial communion. Those responsible at the various levels live their service in this direction; therefore it is important to avoid those critical issues that arise from personalism, self-reference and disobedience to the ecclesiastical magisterium.

From Padre Pio's speech for the tenth anniversary of the Casa Sollievo

5th May 1966

My dear children of Italy and the world, to all of you, near and far, peace and blessings from the Lord.

In speaking to you on this solemn and memorable day, my soul is greatly moved by the Divine Providence which for the past ten years, has been so utterly generous towards the "Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza".

My heartfelt thoughts and thanks also go to those who from the very first instant have collaborated in the implementation of this Work and now from Heaven, where they went to receive the reward for their generous charity, continue to offer spiritual assistance to the "Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza".

But my mind and paternal thoughts are addressed in a very special way to the Prayer Groups, who are now widespread in the world and present here today, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the "Casa" and for their second International Convention.

Next to "Casa di Sollievo", these groups are at the frontline of this little city of charity, nurseries of faith, hubs of love, where Christ himself is present whenever they meet to pray and share the Eucharistic Agape, under the guidance of their Shepherds and spiritual Directors.

Prayer is the force that unites all good souls and moves the world, it revives our consciences, it sustains our "Casa", it comforts all those who are suffering, it heals the sick, it sanctifies our work, it elevates all forms of medical assistance, it gives moral strength and Christian resignation to human suffering, it spreads God's smile and the blessings upon every weakness and frailty.

Pray as much as you can, my children, pray always, without ever getting tired, because it is to prayer that I entrust this Work, which stems from God's will and which will continue to grow thanks to the help of the Divine Providence and the spiritual and charitable contribution of all souls who support it through their prayers.

May the Almighty and Merciful Lord, who accepts for Himself every benefit gained by the suffering brothers, reward you with His superabundant measure.

As a pledge of spiritual gratitude and thankfulness I offer for all of you my daily prayer and suffering, the remembrance in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, in which I present you before the Throne of Divine Majesty, imploring graces and blessings for everyone; especially for the sick in the "Casa Sollievo" and for all the sick in the world spiritually united in one family by the bonds of pain and charity. I recommend to each and all of them that they bear their suffering in a Christian way, in union with the sufferings of Jesus and the Holy Virgin.



PADRE PIO PRAYER GROUPS

"Follow the path that God has chosen for you"

Padre Pio was a concrete person who knew the human soul well, our stubbornness and the vainglory that are often harboured in the people who attended church more frequently. For this reason, from the beginning he wanted a priest to lead the Prayer Groups (the first to be named was Don Giancarlo Setti). Padre Pio never gave much importance to the organizational aspects of the Groups, he only asked that they be characterized by great fidelity to the Gospel and to the Church and that Casa Sollievo be their spiritual reference.

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GETTING TO KNOW PADRE PIO

- ❖ In 1956 the first International Conference of Prayer Groups was organized in Loreto. There were groups from various nations led by Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro.
- ❖ On 19 September 1959, under the presidency of Cardinal Lercaro, the National Convention was held in Catania. On this occasion the Groups consecrated themselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.
- ❖ In September 1967, San Giovanni Rotondo hosted the new National Convention of Prayer Groups, organized to celebrate Padre Pio's 80th birthday.
- ❖ The second International Convention took place between 19 and 22 September 1968 in San Giovanni Rotondo. Gherardo Leone wrote: "Strangely enough, this convention has providentially become like a farewell to its founder, fixed on the eve of his death".
- ❖ On 24th September 1975, the third international conference was held in Rome, followed by the audience of Pope Paul VI in St. Peter's Square.
- ❖ On September 16th, 1977 during the 19th Eucharistic Congress, the Groups met in Pescara on the occasion of the day of suffering. Cardinal Giovanni Colombo presided over this initiative.
- ❖ On 27th August 1983, Monsignor Riccardo Ruotolo, president of the Work of Padre Pio and general manager of the Groups, presided over the first national convention of US groups at the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in New Jersey (USA).
- ❖ On 17th September 1980, in Rome the fourth International Conference was organized with Concelebration in St. Peter's and meeting with Pope John Paul II in the Paul VI room
- ❖ On September 21st, 1987, the National Convention led by Cardinal Corrado Ursi took place in San Giovanni Rotondo, on the occasion of the departure of the Peregrinatio Mariae of Our Lady of Fatima, promoted by the Movement of Padre Pio's Prayer Groups.

PADRE PIO'S WORLD: *The Rosary, the legacy of Padre Pio*

For Pope Pius XII, the Rosary was "more of a divine than human" origin, and if Pope Leone XIII had written 11 encyclicals on the Rosary, Pope Benedict XIV stated: "This form of prayer is wonderfully suited to nourish and arouse both charity and virtue in all souls".

Padre Pio in his immense devotion towards Our Lady defined the Rosary chaplet as "the weapon", in fact he used to say that, through the recitation of the Holy Rosary, Our Lady had rejected not even one grace he had asked of Her. Many of his brothers testified that Padre Pio would recite more than 34 in one day and when they asked him: "*Father, how can you say so many?*". He replied: "*Do not worry, this is not asked of you*".

A few days before Padre Pio's death, a spiritual son of his asked: «*Father, what would you like to tell us?*», He replied: «*Love Our Lady and get everyone to love Her. Pray the rosary, never forget to say it. Recite it as often as you can*».

CLOSE-UP ON PADRE PIO'S PRAYER GROUPS:: *The structure of the Prayer Groups*

The organizational structure of the Groups is essential and can be known in detail by reading the Statute and the Rules. There are two essential points of reference: the International Center of Prayer Groups which is responsible for the entire organizational part (appointments, approval of the Conferences, etc.), which is at the service of the Director General and his council (composed of the two vice presidents and by the general secretary, who is the person dedicated to follow the Groups). The other point of reference for the Groups is the diocese bishop, on whom the Groups legally depend; it is up to him to approve their founding and follow them directly or through a diocese coordinator.

June 16 - (anniversary of the canonization of Padre Pio) Feast of communion

On June 16, anniversary of the canonization of Padre Pio, Prayer Groups from all over the world join together spiritually in prayer and communion of intentions.